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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT -
Lebanese Conflict - Rome Conference
PARIS - Thursday, July 27, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Lebanese Conflict - Rome Conference

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The press today widely criticizes the, particularly in regional editorials, as proof of the powerlessness of the international community. The editorial in Catholic La Croix notes that "the situation calls for urgent action and yet the world seems to be in a race to see who will be the slowest to act." Communist L'Humanite's headline announces that for "Washington it is urgent to wait!" And left-of-center Liberation leads: "A green light for war."

For regional editorialists Bernard Revel in l'Independent du Midi and Herve Chabaud in l'Union et l'Ardennais, the Rome Conference has in essence "condoned Israel's strategy: that the destruction of Hezbollah justifies the disproportionate means used," and was a

forum for "useless chatter."

Left-of-center Le Monde reports that: "The feeling among French diplomats on the eve of the Rome Conference was that the latter would be entirely 'formatted' by the U.S. and that in this context it would only serve as a forum for 'readjusting' discussions... By distancing itself from the American position, concerning the deployment of a peacekeeping force and the necessity for an immediate truce, French diplomacy is pushing for a realignment of the positions."

On privately-run Europe 1 radio, Socialist Party leader Francois Hollande said, concerning the Rome conference: "It was a perfect example of American *laissez-faire*."

In an interview in left-of-center Liberation Simon Peres noted that: "it was a mistake not to invite Israel [to the talks in Rome]. I don't understand why, it must be because of pressure from Arab countries." As for Hezbollah, Peres says "It's us or them..."

Left-of-center Le Monde's headline is devoted to a major interview of French President Chirac on the situation in Lebanon in which he stresses that the solution to the crisis "cannot be a military one." President Chirac emphasizes that "an international peacekeeping force implies certain necessary preliminary conditions. The first is the acceptance of a cease fire on the part of all of the protagonists. The second is the acceptance of the very idea of an international peacekeeping force by the various parties under the UN's Chapter VII... For France NATO's role is not to set up this kind of peacekeeping mission. For technical, but also for political reasons NATO is not appropriate for this kind of intervention. In this region of the world NATO is seen, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, as the strong arm of the West... I am led to understand that the U.S., lacking a more effective, speedy or better solution, would see only the advantages of a NATO intervention by the Rapid Reaction Force... But again, for the reasons already mentioned, NATO is not the right way... The U.S. and France may not have the motives for our commitment [in the region] but we have worked together well [Resolution 1559.] to promote stability."

Following the death of four UN observers in an Israeli air strike, right-of-center Le Figaro mentions the "impossible mission of the UNIFIL observers" who, implanted in southern Lebanon, are subjected to Israeli - Hezbollah crossfire. "The Israeli strategy of quasi continual and often random air strikes in southern Lebanon has proved once again its tragic limitations."

Right-of-center Le Figaro reports that Iran and Syria are "allies in spite of themselves within the Axis of Evil." "The current crisis in the Middle East has forced Teheran and Damascus to radicalize their position and establish a strategic rapprochement... But at first glance Teheran and Damascus do not have much in common. Iran, an Islamic Republic, is in majority Shiite... Syria is largely Sunni and led by a Baathist, secular regime.... Currently, Washington is increasing efforts to isolate Syria from its Iranian ally."

Left-of-center Le Monde's New York correspondent Eric Leser describes the uproar among neoconservatives concerning the Bush Administration's diplomatic efforts in the Middle East seen as "weak" and "confused." "The Neoconservatives, who made themselves very discrete while the situation in Iraq got worse day by day, have come back to the forefront over the last few weeks... For them, the Bush Administration's hesitations are the cause for the renewed confidence of Syria and Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah."

Catholic La Croix reports that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is seeking "an anti-American ally in Russia." His visit to Moscow is part of a wider tour to countries on Washington's "black list." Although Vladimir Putin refrains from joining Chavez's "inflammatory diatribes," arms deals between Russia and Venezuela do not go unnoticed by the U.S., La Croix says.

On the visit of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki to Washington, left-of-center Le Monde reports President Bush's plan to redeploy troops to Baghdad to deal with the instability. According to Le Monde, President Bush stressed that these would not be new soldiers deployed, but soldiers already posted in various provinces throughout Iraq. "This redeployment would go along with a

reinforcement of the equipment of the Iraqi forces and a realignment of the strategy... The differences between Al Maliki and Bush were made clear on the issue of Hezbollah and Lebanon... The American president, for his part, insisted that there is nothing contradictory about sending humanitarian aid to Lebanon while at the same time increasing the American supply of weapons to Israel ... But the differences between the U.S. and Iraq were minimized by the Americans and Stephen Hadley denied any divergence of position concerning Hezbollah."

In left-of-center Le Monde's interview of President Chirac he was asked if the conflict in Iraq can be called a civil war and responded: "If it is not a civil war, it certainly looks a lot like it... But considering that France was not involved in this intervention, it would not be appropriate to give any lessons."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Lebanese Conflict - Rome Conference

"Washington Refuses a Cease Fire"

Right-of-center Le Figaro's Francois Hauter writes (07/27): "The French Foreign Minister Douste Blazy battled it out with Secretary of State Rice and today it appears likely that a resolution will be adopted by the UNSC on August 1 or 2 calling for a generalized truce. But in the meantime, Israel has its hands free... The discussions in Rome clearly showed that there are two camps: on one side the EU, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt as well as Kofi Annan; and on the other the U.S. and Great Britain that unconditionally support Israel... The talks in Rome between Europeans and Americans lasted much longer than expected and Douste Blazy admitted yesterday that with Secretary Rice he had to come back into the fray five times."

"Race to be the Slowest"

Francois Ernewein in Catholic La Croix's editorial (07/27): "The G8 Summit in Saint Petersburg and the Conference in Rome proved the powerlessness of the international community... The word that was the most used in Rome yesterday was 'urgency.' But this rhetorical display did not prevent divergences from setting in among the representatives of the fifteen countries... To the extent that this meeting, held without the Israelis, was just a lot of hot air."

"Failure"

In left-of-center Liberation, Antoine de Gaudemar writes (07/27): "The Rome Conference was much ado about nothing... Indeed the sheer quantity of issues that need resolving could not be dealt with in one meeting. And now Israel has its hands free to continue its operations in Lebanon, where Hezbollah resistance is a lot more tenacious than expected. Tsahal was counting on the tacit support of the Americans who in spite of Condoleezza Rice's spectacular tour of the region, are not rushing to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict..."

"Two Visions of the World"

Regional daily Ouest France's Didier Eugene writes (07/27): "The U.S. is asking for a 'durable solution' and France for a 'political solution,' behind the words there is a conflicting vision of the world."

"France's Voice"

In regional La Nouvelle Republique du Centre, the editorial by Herve Cannel (07/27): "French soldiers on the border between Lebanon and Israel vainly trying to keep the peace? Jacques Chirac's dream is a courageous one, but if it means seeing coffins return to France covered with the French flag, no thanks! Been there, done that... But since the U.S. has not yet come around to putting the pressure necessary to stop the massacre and the systematic tearing apart of Lebanon, the only voice that can be heard today is that of France."

"Failure"

Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de la Manche (07/27): "Yesterday's conference in Rome will be remembered as a failure. Because it is indeed Lebanon that is being destroyed, not Hezbollah... and the American administration is encouraging this since it has no intention of trying to put the brakes on the Israeli offensive... The possibility of sending peacekeeping troops was discussed in Rome... A mission in which Europe will provide the

soldiers while the U.S. sells the weapons [to Israel].

"A voice in the Wilderness"

Dominique Garraud in regional La Charente Libre (07/27): "Similar to discussion during the time of the military intervention in Iraq, the discussions concerning Lebanon has pitted those who want the crisis to be settled using forceps, in the name of the global war on terrorism, and those who have a better understanding of the local and regional complexities in the Middle East... and know that the price to pay for peace may be concessions made to certain movements and negotiations with the sort of countries that should not have to be associated with... But the UN and France may once again find themselves voices in the wilderness with regard to the Bush Administration which has apparently not yet drawn the necessary lessons from the fiasco in Iraq." STAPLETON